



PEACE CORPS

WELCOMES YOU TO



GUATEMALA

A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS
June 2015

MAP OF GUATEMALA



WELCOME LETTER

Congratulations on your invitation to pre-service training in Guatemala! I am sure you are excited and have many questions. Peace Corps/Guatemala prepared this book to provide you with information, friendly advice, and resources to help you on your path of discovery. It will certainly not answer all of your questions and may even raise more. There are as many perspectives on Guatemala as there are people living here. With time, you will find your own answers and definition of Guatemala. We do know that one of the most significant factors in Volunteer satisfaction is the appeal of Guatemala and Guatemalans themselves.

Peace Corps/Guatemala will offer you solid support, training, a well-designed project assignment, and a carefully selected site in which to live and work. In return, we have high expectations of the Volunteers who accept the challenge to serve. Please review this book carefully before deciding whether you are willing to make the lifestyle adjustments and personal sacrifices necessary to represent the Peace Corps, as a Volunteer's responsibility goes well beyond his or her work assignment.

A two-year commitment to the Peace Corps is not made easily or casually. It is a commitment you will need to renew frequently throughout your two years. You will be challenged in every way imaginable and your patience will be tried to its limits. But if you come with an open mind, a warm heart, a willingness to work, and a good sense of humor, you will do well. We offer you this opportunity to serve the people of Guatemala and to have an experience that may change the way you view the world and yourself.

If you feel you have the motivation, flexibility, and the right attitude to carry out the duties of a Peace Corps Volunteer, then we look forward to you joining the dynamic group of Volunteers already serving in Guatemala. I look forward to meeting you here.

Sincerely,

George Like
Country Director, Guatemala

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CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps mission of promoting world peace and friendship, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to do the following:

1. Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months
2. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed
3. Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service
4. Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture
5. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance
6. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and respect
7. Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others
9. Recognize that you will be perceived in your host country and community as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America
10. Represent responsively the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service

PEACE CORPS/GUATEMALA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Guatemala

The first Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Guatemala in 1963. Since then, more than 4,800 Volunteers have served in the country, providing assistance to rural families in cooperation with governmental and nongovernmental organizations. During an average year, approximately 120 Volunteers serve in Guatemala. Currently, Peace Corps Volunteers are assigned to work on projects related to agriculture, health, and youth.

Peace Corps Programming in Guatemala

Projects evolve with the changing needs and opportunities in Guatemala. Brief descriptions of our current projects follow.

Healthy Schools: Volunteers in this project facilitate health education with accredited Guatemalan primary school teachers, who are trained by Volunteers to teach health lessons. Volunteers teach students about health and personal hygiene, assist in developing training workshops for teachers, and work with parent-school and/or municipal committees to promote school sanitation.

Maternal and Child Health: Volunteers in this project work with the Ministry of Health and local health educators to create a training methodology that effectively teaches rural families about health and simple technologies to improve family health conditions. Volunteers also work on strategic initiatives in the area of maternal and child health such as local health commissions and support of rural community health emergency procedures.

Youth in Development: The purpose of the youth development project is to prepare Guatemalan rural youth for their adult roles in the areas of the family and work. Volunteers work with youth in secondary schools to increase their knowledge and life skills and work with parents, teachers, and local leaders to help communities provide greater support to young people.

Food Security Initiative: As a cross-sector initiative, Food Security trains all Volunteers in food security basics. Being trained in nutrition and basic gardening, PCVs learn how to promote stronger, sustainable nutrition in their sites. Peace Corps Response Volunteers are also brought in to support organizations working with Feed the Future.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: GUATEMALA AT A GLANCE

History

For much of its post-European contact history, Guatemala was a colonial state, in which kingdoms and the church were the sole sources of legitimate power. The compensation for colonial administrators was in the form of land grants and control over the people living on those lands. Colonial administrators were expected to collect taxes on behalf of kingdoms, and the expectation was that a portion of the taxes collected would be used by the administrator for personal expenses.

Guatemala gained independence from Spanish colonial rule on September 15, 1821. During the second half of the 20th century, Guatemala experienced a variety of military and civilian governments, as well as a 36-year guerrilla war, which led to the massacre of more than 200,000 people and created approximately 1 million refugees. Ninety-two percent of the deaths were attributed to the Guatemalan military. In 1996, the government signed a peace agreement formally ending the conflict. Although the signing of the peace accord ended the internal armed conflict, the causes of the war are deeply rooted and tenaciously resistant. Former combatants and perpetrators of the massacres often live side by side with the victims and their families. A continued high level of violence and crime is an unfortunate part of the ongoing struggle of all Guatemalans to recover from the trauma of war.

Government

Guatemala is a constitutional democratic republic. The current constitution became effective in January 1986. It was suspended by President Jorge Serrano from May 1993 until his ousting in June of that year. The executive branch consists of the president and vice president, elected through a popular vote every four years, and cabinet members appointed by the president. There is a unicameral congress; members are elected by popular vote every four years. Supreme Court members, who serve five-year terms, are appointed by the president of Guatemala and the outgoing president of the court. Suffrage is universal for Guatemalans over the age of 18, excluding soldiers on active duty in the armed services. The country is divided into 22 departments. National and municipal elections will be held in September 2015 where all elected officials in the country will be selected. The president needs to win by over 50 percent of the vote so most often there is a run-off election for the two top vote-getters of the first election, which usually has 10–15 candidates running for the presidency.

Economy

Agriculture is one of the largest economic sectors and accounts for approximately 60 percent of the work force, 25 percent of the gross domestic product, and 30 percent of exports. Wealthy farmers, using the best agricultural land, produce traditional exports: coffee, bananas, cardamom, cotton, beef, and sugar. Subsistence farmers work on small plots of marginal land, mainly producing beans and corn for local consumption.

A quickly expanding nontraditional sector produces and exports non-indigenous fruits, vegetables, ornamental plants, and flowers.

Manufacturing and construction account for one-fifth of gross domestic product. Assuming office in January 1996, then-President Arzu worked to implement a program of economic liberalization and political modernization. The signing of the peace accords in December 1996 removed a major obstacle to foreign investment. Remaining challenges include increasing government revenues, tax collection, negotiating further assistance from international donors, and increasing the efficiency and transparency of both government and private financial operations. Recent administrations have all tried to promote more economic growth and, at the same time, increase public health and educational services.

Guatemala also ratified the Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA-DR) in March 2005, and the agreement went into effect on July 1, 2006. This agreement eliminated customs tariffs on many categories of goods, opened services sectors, and created more enforceable rules across various market sectors.

People and Culture

Guatemala straddles the frontier between traditional village cultures and a national culture. Urban populations and communities in the east or *oriente* tend to be dominated by Spanish-speaking *ladinos* (the term used for people whose primary cultural identification is as non-Indian) and rural populations in the western highlands consist mainly of indigenous peoples, including Quiché, Q'eqchi', Kaqchikel, Mam, Tz'utujil, and more than 15 other ethnic groups.

At the risk of greatly over-simplifying extremely complex phenomena, Guatemalan village culture tends to be organized along lines of familial and marriage relationships. Outsiders, even those with the best of intentions, tend to be viewed by villagers with suspicion. The Guatemalan village culture tends to focus on those aspects of life that reinforce the community's understanding of its shared history, and there is the tendency to idealize the past. In general, Guatemalan villagers consider the problems they confront to be the result of outside forces or the consequence of villagers' failure to follow local cultural traditions. The national culture, toward which the country is gradually moving, is organized along the lines of geographic residence, encompassing successively larger administrative units, culminating in the idea of the nation itself. Within the national culture, there is the belief that local problems are best resolved by local communities. The reconciliation of these two world views is one of the major challenges that Guatemala faces.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Guatemala and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although the Peace Corps tries to make sure all these links are active and current, the Peace Corps cannot guarantee it. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit your local library. Libraries offer free Internet usage and often let you print information to take home.

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, be aware that you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own experiences, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and please keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

General Information About Guatemala

State.gov

The Department of State's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Guatemala and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

Gpo.gov/libraries/public/

The U.S. Government Publishing Office publishes country studies intermittently.

lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html

The Library of Congress provides historical and sociological data on numerous countries.

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World_Statistics_Pocketbook_2013_edition.pdf

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data

Data.un.org

United Nations site with links to data from U.N. member countries

Wikipedia.org

Search for Guatemala to find encyclopedia-type information. Note: As Wikipedia content is user-generated, information may be biased and/or not verified.

Worldbank.org

The World Bank Group's mission is to fight poverty and improve the living standards of people in the developing world. It is a development bank that provides loans, policy advice, technical assistance, and knowledge-sharing services to developing countries to reduce poverty. This site contains a lot of information and resources regarding development.

Data.worldbank.org/country

Provides information on development indicators on countries, including population, gender, financial, and education, and climate change statistics.

www.countrywatch.com/

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in the capital of Guatemala to how to convert from the dollar to the Guatemala Quetzal. Just click on Guatemala and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

Visit this site for general travel advice about almost any country in the world.

www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm

This includes links to all the official sites for governments worldwide.

www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm

This online world atlas includes maps and geographical information, and each country page contains links to other sites, such as the Library of Congress, that contain comprehensive historical, social, and political background.

www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp

This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states of the U.N.

www.worldinformation.com

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries around the world.

Peace Corps/Guatemala

Guatemala.peacecorps.gov

Peace Corps/Guatemala website

<https://www.facebook.com/PeaceCorpsGuatemala>

Peace Corps/Guatemala on Facebook is a place to celebrate successes, promoting partners, and connecting with friends and family.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/peacecorpsguatemala/sets/>

Peace Corps/Guatemala on Flickr is a photo documentary of the post's and Volunteers' work.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/PeaceCorpsGuatemala>

A collection of Peace Corps/Guatemala videos

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

RPCV.org

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the "Friends of" groups for most countries of service, comprised of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups that frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities. Or go straight to the Friends of Guatemala site:

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Guatemala/398492540266401?ref=stream>

PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org

This site, hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers, is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Guatemala

UN.org/News/

The United Nations news service provides coverage of its member states and information about the international peacekeeping organization's actions and positions.

VOAnews.com

Voice of America, the U.S. government's multimedia broadcaster, features coverage of news around the world.

www.prensalibre.com (in Spanish)

Prensa Libre

www.sigloxxi.com (in Spanish)

Siglo Veintiuno

www.lahora.com.gt (in Spanish)

La Hora

www.elperiodico.com.gt (in Spanish)

El Periódico

www.revuemag.com/home/ (in English)

The Revue

International Development Sites About Guatemala

It is difficult to obtain a comprehensive picture of Guatemala and the dynamic development efforts being carried out there. Nonetheless, the sites below can give you some of the macro-perspectives of different development players including the World Bank, USAID, and the UN.

<http://www.usaid.gov/Guatemala>

USAID

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/Guatemala>

World Bank

<http://www.oecd.org/countries/guatemala/46820221.pdf>

OECD

<http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/GTM.pdf>

UNDP

Recommended Books

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. "All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s." Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. "The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps." Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. "Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver." Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.
4. Meisler, Stanley. "When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years." Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.

Books on the Volunteer Experience

1. Dirlam, Sharon. "Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place." Santa Barbara, CA: McSeas Books, 2004.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. "Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience." Gig Harbor, WA: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Erdman, Sarah. "Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village." New York City: Picador, 2003.
4. Hessler, Peter. "River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze." New York City: Perennial, 2001.
5. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. "From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps." Santa Monica, CA: Clover Park Press, 1991.
6. Thomsen, Moritz. "Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle." Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

Books About Guatemala

1. Archdiocese of Guatemala. "Guatemala: Never Again!" trans. Thomas Quigley. Orbis Books, 1999.
2. Victor Montejo. "Voices from Exile: Violence and Survival in Modern Maya History." University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.
3. Victor Perera and Daniel Chauche (photographer). "Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy." University of California Press, 1995.

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service that is considered normal in the United States. Guatemala's mail service is fair, but often unreliable. Mail usually takes at least two weeks to arrive; however, it is common for letters to arrive much later, or never at all. It is recommended that you arrange a system of numbering correspondence with family and friends.

Once you complete training and are assigned to your site you will need to inform family and friends of your mailing address in your community.

Receiving packages can be problematic as packages might be held at the central post office for pickup and customs duties will be your responsibility. Often, the packages are opened or never arrive at all. Experience has shown that small padded envelopes are most likely to arrive intact.

Telephones

As cellphones are an important tool for Volunteers in terms of safety and security, work, and support, trainees are assigned official cellphones in the second week of training to use throughout their service as Volunteers in Guatemala. Invitees are strongly discouraged from bringing a cellphone from the United States, as it is highly unlikely that your plan will cover Guatemala and the surrounding region.

The organization to which you are assigned (your host agency) may have telephone service at its office; however, that office may be a great distance from where you live. In the more developed cities, residential phone service is available, and there are a few Volunteers who have home phones. Also, most communities have families who rent out their phone for calls.

The Peace Corps office in Guatemala can be reached by direct dialing from the United States. The number is 011.502.7828.2500. Volunteers are not permitted to use telephones at the Peace Corps office in Guatemala to call family and friends unless the call pertains to an emergency and is approved by the country director.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Computer and Internet access exists throughout much of Guatemala. Much like the telephone, most Volunteers will be able to use these services locally or during a short trip to a nearby town. Internet cafés can be found in most Guatemalan cities or towns. Since connection fees can be high, Peace Corps/Guatemala includes a small stipend for Internet use in your monthly living allowance to help defray the costs. There are also Internet-connected computers at the Peace Corps offices. Many host agencies have Internet-connected computers that you might also be able to access for work-related or personal use.

Many Volunteers bring laptop computers with them, which they use for work or personal purposes and, via USB modems, most will have access to the Internet. Netbook-style computers, because of their small size and lower cost, are also good options for day-to-day use. Please note: Possessing a laptop can be a security concern in Guatemala, since they command high prices on the black market. They can also be damaged or lost and specialized repair services may be expensive or non-existent.

Housing and Site Location

Volunteer housing and site locations vary depending on your project and the type of work you will do. Peace Corps staff members work with your host agency, Volunteers who currently live in the area, and municipal leaders to locate appropriate sites and determine if the living conditions meet selection criteria established by the Peace Corps. In addition, the Peace Corps consults with security staff at the U.S. embassy to review any pertinent safety concerns that might be present in a geographic area.

Because of the importance of community integration and for your own safety and security, you are **required** to live with a host family for the duration of your Volunteer service. Privacy may at times be scarce, but the experience of sharing day-to-day life with a Guatemalan family will hasten your cultural adaptation, language ability, and will help you appreciate the lifestyle of rural Guatemalan families. Your personal safety will be enhanced when the community sees you as a part of a local family. As this housing policy is a mandatory and non-negotiable requirement, it is important to think about this commitment and your ability to be flexible enough to live with a family in basic conditions, with limited privacy. Volunteer couples are also required to live with a family.

The type of house you live in will depend on what is common in the area. In a city or large town, this will likely be a cement block house with a tin or tile roof and a solid floor. Most will have electricity. Most households in Guatemala have a *pila*—a large cement sink for washing dishes and clothes, with a section for collecting water. In more developed areas, you will likely have plumbing, although service may be intermittent. You may have a flush toilet or use a latrine that is separate from the house.

Volunteers in more rural areas may live in a house of cement or adobe (homemade brick), with a tin or cement roof and a tile or cement floor. Electricity is present in almost all areas, even small villages. However, power outages are very frequent, especially in rural sites. You may come to rely on candles and lanterns during the evening. Most will have an outside *pila*, but you may find yourself carrying water from a community water source or collecting rainwater to fill it. In some areas, people use a community *pila* or a river for their water source.

Living Allowance and Money Management

Volunteers receive a monthly allowance in Guatemalan quetzal that is sufficient to live at the level of the local people. The allowance covers food, housing, household supplies, clothing, transportation to and from work, utilities, recreation and entertainment, and incidental expenses. Peace Corps Volunteers are expected to live at a level that is comparable with that of their host country counterparts. The Peace Corps discourages Volunteers from supplementing their living allowance with funds from home.

Volunteers are entirely responsible for managing their personal finances. The principal bank used by Peace Corps/Guatemala is Banco Industrial. Upon arrival in Guatemala, each Volunteer will open a personal checking account with this bank and sign a power of attorney form authorizing Peace Corps/Guatemala to make deposits for living allowances and reimbursements as necessary. Prior to leaving Guatemala, each Volunteer must personally close the account after determining that all checks and payments have cleared and must make the necessary arrangements to cover those that have not. For convenience, Volunteers often access their living allowance via ATMs which are usually within a short distance from their sites.

Food and Diet

Most Volunteers enjoy eating the typical food in their community. In towns and cities, you will usually find a greater variety; in poor rural areas, the food choices can be limited. Throughout Guatemala, corn tortillas and black beans are a staple. Other common foods include eggs, rice, chicken soup, and bread delivered from bakeries in larger towns. These foods are eaten daily in most poor areas of Guatemala. The

most common fruits and vegetables include tomatoes, onions, avocado, a squash called *huitlacoche* (chayote in the United States), bananas, and mangoes (when in season). Papaya and citrus fruits are found in some areas. Chicken or pork tamales are also common, in addition to a sweet rice or corn drink called *atol*. In more developed areas, you might find a greater variety of food, including more meat (usually chicken) and more fruits and vegetables.

Even in the most rural areas, there are usually small local stores that stock snacks, sodas, and staples. Traditional outdoor markets, where you can find fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, clothing, and household items are open on a regular basis (usually weekly) in central towns and are always open in main cities. In larger cities, you will also find supermarkets, where you can purchase nonperishable items and imported goods. Some Volunteers take advantage of the opportunity to stock up on special foods and cooking items, such as spices, peanut butter, and pasta when visiting larger cities.

Being a vegetarian as a Volunteer is not difficult. In many of the poorer areas, for example, meat is rarely eaten. However, meat is prepared on special occasions and there will likely be situations when meat is offered to you. Many Volunteers have successfully served as vegetarians, and you will need to find appropriate strategies to deal with these situations, depending on your specific circumstances.

Transportation and Traveling in Guatemala

Peace Corps/Guatemala has implemented a comprehensive, strict transportation and travel policy for trainees and Volunteers. Transportation and travel risks are some of the more serious safety and security concerns you will face while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Because of safety and security concerns, Peace Corps/Guatemala prohibits travel on some public intercity bus routes and has travel restrictions in place for various regions of the country. Some of these policies require use of specified transportation methods, avoidance of restricted travel zones, travel only in daylight-hours, and use of approved hotels and hostels. Volunteers must obtain advance authorization prior to traveling to Guatemala City or outside of designated geographic areas and must comply with travel and transportation policies.

In general, Guatemala has extensive and relatively cheap transportation in major urban areas and relatively good access in some rural areas. Volunteers often travel around their sites for work activities on foot, in the company of other community members or work colleagues.

For local travel, Volunteers usually ride in vans or “chicken buses” (U.S. school buses painted and outfitted with racks to haul supplies and sometimes animals). In other areas, pickup trucks provide transportation to villages on a regular basis instead of a bus. Sometimes, you may arrange for a ride with someone you know who has a car or pickup.

For long distances on major routes, there are “Pullmans,” which are similar to Greyhound buses and provide a more comfortable and secure ride at a higher fee. In some rural areas, there may be only one bus in and out of your site daily leaving in the morning and returning in the afternoon. The Peace Corps/Guatemala transportation policy will guide you on the safest and approved routes and transportation methods.

Volunteers should always use the safest transportation method available. Volunteers have to take the time to plan their official and leisure trips out of their sites, using the safest transport within their budget.

Geography and Climate

Guatemala is the northernmost and most populous of the Central American republics. More than 14 million people live in an area about the size of Tennessee or Ohio. Guatemala has coastlines on the Pacific and the Caribbean, and it borders Mexico, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador.

The central highlands are the most densely populated area. Between the highlands and the Pacific lies a narrow plain. The Caribbean lowlands have fertile river valleys. The north of the country contains tropical jungles and protected biospheres.

Temperatures are fairly constant year-round and are most influenced by elevation. In the cattle country of eastern Guatemala and coastal lowlands, temperatures can reach 100 degrees Fahrenheit. In western Guatemala, the highest part of Central America (and location where most Volunteers are placed), the climate is cold, and morning temperatures in December and January are frequently below freezing. In areas of more moderate elevation, the climate is generally cooler in the mornings and evenings, but warm to hot in the afternoons. Average temperatures fluctuate between 50 and 70 F. The most noticeable feature of Guatemala's tropical climate is the seasonal alternation between dry and rainy seasons. From May to October, most parts of the country get rain every day, resulting in lush vegetation and cooler temperatures. During the dry season (November to April), rain tapers off and most sections of the country get no rain. This results in dry, dusty weather and hotter temperatures.

Social Activities

There are three prominent aspects of rural social life in Guatemala. The first has to do with the religious celebrations of the community and families. Births, confirmations, coming-of-age ceremonies, communions, marriages, and funerals are themes for the celebration of life. Funerals, in particular, are the recognition of the accomplishments and thoughts of the departed.

The second aspect of social life in rural Guatemala centers on the market, which is far more than a place to buy needed goods. The market is the place to meet and visit with people to exchange news and have discussions.

The third facet of social life is inter-community competition. Winning a soccer game against a neighboring community, or even losing, creates a sense of solidarity and identity. For most Volunteers, getting involved with sporting events and activities is the easiest way to integrate fully into the community.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

In Guatemala, a Peace Corps Volunteer is expected to be a development professional, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to the highest quality of work. It takes most Volunteers a while to get a sense of what constitutes a reasonable personal workload. Some Volunteers may have a busy schedule of activities set up with their counterparts or host agency. Other Volunteers may be in a less structured environment, where they must get to know their community, find various avenues for work, and develop their own schedules. Because of logistical considerations, some routine tasks will take longer to complete in Guatemala than in the United States.

Appropriate dress is very important, since physical appearance makes a personal statement in Guatemala. What constitutes appropriate dress for work will vary depending on the type of work you will be doing. Your volunteer assignment description (VAD) will provide specific guidelines.

In general, the norm is a conservative, neat appearance. Except in tourist areas and a few locations near the coast, men do not wear shorts or sandals. Pants or jeans with a clean button-down shirt, polo, or nice T-shirt are common for work and casual wear. Tattoos and any type of piercings on men are associated with drug dealers and gang members. Male volunteers must be prepared to remove piercings and cover tattoos. Long hair is uncommon for men and having your hair neat and worn in an acceptable style is required and allows for greater integration. Any type of military-style clothing (e.g., camouflage) is strictly prohibited because of association with the civil war. You will be expected to adjust your appearance, if necessary, to accommodate the above standards.

Women in Guatemala tend to take pride in their appearance and “dress up.” In indigenous areas, women wear hand-woven traditional dress. In other areas of the country, dress varies depending on the site. In conservative areas and small villages, you are likely to see women wearing mid-length dresses or skirts with a blouse or T-shirt. In towns and more modern areas, it is common to see women in pants or jeans, and you might see women dressed in a manner that Americans might consider flashy. Female Volunteers are not expected to adopt traditional dress or dress like the women in their community; however, your attire should reflect your status as a professional. Female Volunteers usually wear dresses, skirts, pants, or jeans, with short-sleeved or modest sleeveless blouses in hotter climates. Shorts, bare shoulders, and tank tops should be avoided except while on vacation in tourist areas. For assignments that require a lot of hiking or field work, pants are most appropriate. It is important to note that tight or revealing clothing for women could attract negative attention. Volunteers are expected to dress conservatively.

The Peace Corps has a zero-tolerance policy on the use of illegal drugs, including marijuana. Drug use is illegal in Guatemala, and puts both the safety of the Volunteer and the image of the Peace Corps at great risk.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps’ approach to safety is contained in the Safety and Security section, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help reduce the risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Guatemala. Using these tools, one can be empowered to take responsibility for his or her safety and well-being.

Each staff member at the Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the support they need to successfully meet the challenges they will face to have a safe, healthy, and productive service. Volunteers and families are encouraged to look at safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at peacecorps.gov/safety.

Information on these pages gives messages on Volunteer health and safety. There is a section titled Safety and Security in Depth. Among topics addressed are the risks of serving as a Volunteer, posts’ safety support systems, and emergency planning and communications.

Rewards and Frustrations

Both the rewards and frustrations of service in Guatemala seem to come mostly from the differences between U.S. and Guatemalan culture. In the United States, the culture emphasizes “action” or “doing,” in which a person’s value to society is assessed primarily in terms of what he or she is able to achieve over the course of a lifetime. In Guatemala, the culture emphasizes “being,” where social value is a function of affiliation and group solidarity. Some Volunteers have a difficult time appreciating the importance of simply spending time with associates and community members to establish trust based on interpersonal relationships. Most agencies to which Volunteers are assigned have little cultural understanding of the U.S. ethic of volunteerism, and they may have a limited understanding of what kind of support and supervision Volunteers need to feel productive. The rewards, particularly for self-starters with high energy, are ample opportunities to make a measurable difference in the lives of the people served.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

The Peace Corps uses a competency-based training approach throughout the continuum of learning, supporting you from arrival in Guatemala to your departure. Pre-service training (PST) is the first event within this continuum of learning and ensures that you are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform your job. Pre-service training is conducted in Guatemala by Peace Corps staff, most of whom are locally hired trainers. Peace Corps staff measure achievement of learning and determine if you have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Peace Corps training incorporates widely accepted principles of adult learning and is structured around the experiential learning cycle. Successful training results in competence in various technical, linguistic, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security areas.

Integrating into the community is one of the core competencies you will strive to achieve both in PST and during the first several months of service. Successful sustainable development work is based on the relationships you build by respectfully integrating into the host country community and culture.

You will be prepared for this through a homestay experience, which often requires trainees to live with host families during PST. Integration into the community fosters language and cross-cultural learning and ensures your health, safety, and security.

The Peace Corps office is located in Santa Lucia Milpas Altas, in the department of Sacatepéquez. This is a small town settled along the road that runs between Antigua and Guatemala City. Pre-service training consists of nine and a half weeks of hands-on activities to help you develop and practice the skills you will need as a Volunteer. In this first part of training, you will focus on developing skills in language, culture, health, safety and security, and basic technical skills. After being at your site for several months, you will return to the Peace Corps office for an additional two weeks of training, primarily in your technical area. Our training philosophy can be summed up by the phrase Learning by doing. There will be some classroom work and some readings, but most of the training will be in your training community, using methods and materials available to the people and communities with whom you will be working.

Pre-service training provides the opportunity for you to continue to explore your commitment to service and understand what is expected of Volunteers who serve in Guatemala. Volunteers will need to demonstrate your ability to successfully work in development through your acquisition of local language, your application of technical, cultural, safety, and health skills, and through professionalism and integration into your Guatemalan host community. Peace Corps staff will provide you with both verbal and written feedback throughout the pre-service training process to help you understand your progress toward becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Guatemala by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Guatemala experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in Guatemala and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and objectives

and will meet with the Guatemala agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities, report your progress, and serve as a productive member of your community.

After your first few months in site, you will return to the Peace Corps office to receive additional technical training based on priorities you have identified through a community diagnostic assessment. Your technical skills will build upon what you already know and be geared toward real-world application.

Language Training

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, help you integrate into your community, and can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Guatemala language instructors usually teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so you can practice and develop language skills further once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will develop strategies to continue studying language during your service.

If you come to Guatemala with an advanced level of Spanish you will receive several weeks of training in Guatemalan expressions and culture and then be given work assignments to carry out in your training community. Many advanced speakers want to continue perfecting their Spanish in structured language activities like their colleagues who are starting at a lower level; however, Peace Corps language training is designed to assist trainees in reaching the language level necessary to begin work. Those who are tested at a more advanced Spanish level will begin more substantive work in their training communities earlier than trainees who need more language training.

Near the end of pre-service training, all Volunteers will also receive a half-day orientation to Mayan languages. For Volunteers who live in communities where Mayan languages are spoken, they will be required to take beginning classes in the first few months and then later may apply to the Mayan language program where a local language instructor will continue tutoring in the local language.

Cross-Cultural Training

Cross-cultural training will provide opportunities for you to reflect on your own cultural values and how they influence your behavior in Guatemala. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Guatemala, exploring the underlying reasons for these behaviors and practices.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. Training will cover topics such as the concept of time, power and hierarchy, gender roles, communication styles, and the concept of self and relationships. Because adjusting to a new culture can be very challenging, you will participate in resiliency training which provides a framework and tools to help with adjustment issues.

The host family experience provides a unique context for cross-cultural learning, and is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to

explain the purpose of PST and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Guatemala. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Health Training

During pre-service training, you will be trained in health prevention, basic first aid, and treatment of medical illnesses found in Guatemala. You will be expected to practice preventive health and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. Health education topics will cover nutrition, food and water preparation, emotional health, dealing with alcohol, prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and common illnesses in Guatemala.

These sessions are an important part of your training. Your collaboration with us in this partnership is the most important aspect. Your health will depend on how well you assume personal responsibility for your own well-being. You will need to make a concerted effort to institute healthful practices into your daily routine. It is our goal to make you aware of the physical, environmental, and social factors that affect your health while in Guatemala. Peace Corps/Guatemala's medical sessions have been designed to provide the support, reinforcement, and development of your skills for health maintenance and disease prevention.

Safety and Security Training

During the safety and security training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention, how to identify safety risks in-country and about Peace Corps' emergency response and support systems.

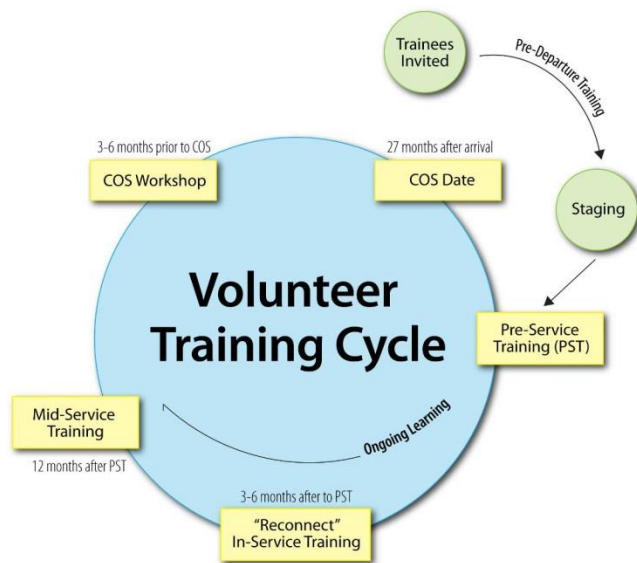
After receiving classroom sessions on safety, you will put the skills into practice throughout your host family stay, while using local transportation, and during your work in the community. Peace Corps staff and your host family will provide you with guidance and feedback throughout training to help you develop reflexes, behaviors, and habits that can help you reduce risk.

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

The Peace Corps' training system provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- **In-service training:** Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- **Midservice training** (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- **Close-of-service conference:** Prepares Volunteers for their future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.



YOUR HEALTH CARE IN GUATEMALA

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Guatemala maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer who takes care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs, including evaluation and treatment of most medical conditions. Additional medical services are also available in Guatemala at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in Guatemala, you will be transported to a Peace Corps-approved regional medical facility. If the Office of Health Services (OHS) determines that the care is not optimal for your condition at the regional facility, you will be transported to the United States.

Health Issues in Guatemala

Outside of major cities, the national health-care infrastructure is based mainly on rural clinics, supported by some hospitals. There are excellent air ambulance services in case of emergencies. The role of clinics, other than diagnosing endemic health problems and coordinating the training of midwives, is to refer complicated cases to service providers in the larger cities. In many areas of Guatemala, health problems associated with poverty such as malnutrition, water- and food-borne illnesses, tuberculosis, and parasitic infestations are fairly common. Malaria, dengue fever, Chikungunya, and Chagas disease are also present. Most health problems in Guatemala can be avoided by consistently using preventive measures.

Helping You Stay Healthy

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Guatemala, you will receive a country-specific medical handbook. By the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this section.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, during this time, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the Peace Corps will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Guatemala will consult with the Office of Health Services in Washington, D.C., or a regional medical officer. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Guatemala, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

Maintaining Your Health

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The adage "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Guatemala is to take the following preventive measures:

- Compliance with malaria prophylaxis. Failure to take malaria prophylaxis may result in significant illness and possible termination of service.
- For all bites from warm-blooded animals, you should assume the animal is rabid, inform the medical officer, and come into the office for rabies prophylaxis.
- Do not wait until a medical problem becomes critical before seeking treatment.

- Adhere to food and water preparation practices.
- Understand and follow Peace Corps policies relating to drug use (zero tolerance) and alcohol consumption (use in moderation).

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worms, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Guatemala during pre-service training.

Abstinence is the most effective way to prevent infection with HIV and other STIs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV/AIDS or other STIs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue.

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. Your medical officer can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officer.

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations, and that you let the medical officer know immediately of significant illnesses and injuries.

Women's Health Information

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Guatemala will provide them. If you require a specific product, please bring a three-month supply with you. Many female Volunteers take menstrual cups (The Diva Cup, The Keeper, The Moon Cup, etc.) to avoid potential problems with availability or disposal of feminine hygiene products.

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer chooses to remain in-country. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that the Peace Corps' medical standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met.

The Peace Corps follows the 2012 U.S. Preventive Services Task Force guidelines for screening PAP smears, which recommend women aged 21–29 receive screening PAPs every three years and women aged 30–65 receive screening PAPs every five years. As such, most Volunteers will not receive a PAP during their service, but can use Peace Corps supplied health insurance after service to have an exam.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with a kit containing basic items to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office.

Medical Kit Contents

First Aid Handbook	Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)
Ace bandages	Antibiotic ointment
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Antifungal cream
Adhesive tape	Antihistamine
Antacid tablets	Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner

Band-Aids
Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)
Butterfly closures
Calagel anti-itch gel
Condoms
Cough lozenges
Decongestant
Dental floss
Gloves
Hydrocortisone cream
Ibuprofen

Insect repellent
Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Lip balm
Oral rehydration salts
Scissors
Sore throat lozenges
Sterile eye drops
Sterile gauze pads
Sunscreen
Thermometer (Temp-a-dots)
Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Health Services (OHS). Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact OHS to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Health Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office to obtain a copy of your immunization record and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations (other than yellow fever vaccination as directed by OHS) prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or during your first six months in Guatemala. Volunteers must be willing to get all required vaccinations unless there is a documented medical contraindication. Failure to accept required vaccination is grounds for administrative separation from the Peace Corps. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements. Medications supplied may be generic or equivalent to your current medications (including birth control pills).

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs (of the current prescription) with you. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps Office of Health Services strongly discourages Volunteers from wearing contact lenses while overseas unless there is a true medical indication documented by your ophthalmologist. Contact lenses, particularly extended use soft contacts, are associated with a variety of eye infections and other inflammatory problems. One of the most serious

of these problems is infectious keratitis which can lead to severe cornea damage which could result in permanent blindness requiring corneal transplantation. These risks of permanent eye damage are exacerbated in the Peace Corps environment where the Volunteer's ability to properly clean the lenses is compromised due to limited access to sterile water as well as decreased effectiveness of cleaning solutions due to prolonged storage in unsatisfactory conditions. In addition, when bacterial eye infections occur, assessment and treatment within hours by a competent ophthalmologist is indicated. This is virtually impossible in the Peace Corps setting. If you feel that you simply must be able to use your contacts occasionally, please consider using single use, daily disposable lenses which do not require cleaning.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health-care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health-care benefits described in the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling in your current plan when you return home.

SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH

Ensuring the safety and security of Volunteers is the Peace Corps' highest priority. Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property theft and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Volunteers complete their two years of service without a serious safety and security incident. Together, the Peace Corps and Volunteers can reduce risk, but cannot truly eliminate all risk.

Beyond knowing that the Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you, it might be helpful to see how this partnership works. The Peace Corps has policies, procedures, and training in place to promote your safety. The Peace Corps depends on you to follow those policies and to put into practice what you have learned. An example of how this works in practice—in this case to help manage the risk and impact of burglary—follows:

- The Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work.
- The Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria.
- The Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country counterparts or other community leaders in your new community.
- The Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise.
- You will live with host families the entire 27 months of service.
- You lock your doors and windows, and keep valuables in a lock box or trunk.
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live.
- You get to know your neighbors.
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you.
- You don't change residences before being authorized by the Peace Corps.
- You communicate your concerns to Peace Corps staff.

Peace Corps/Guatemala has policies in place that seek to reduce your safety and security risks. For example, Volunteers are prohibited from riding on motorcycles, using some public transportation options, or traveling to specified regions of the country. Volunteers are expected to abide by all transportation and travel policies. Failure to follow these policies will result in disciplinary action, including administrative separation from Peace Corps. Volunteers are also expected to notify Peace Corps staff of all crime incidents that affect them

This welcome book contains sections on Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle, Peace Corps Training, Your Health Care, and Safety and Security, all of which include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the training and tools they need to function in the safest way possible and prepare for the unexpected, teaching you to identify, reduce, and manage the risks you may encounter.

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are within the Volunteer's control. By far the most common crime that Volunteers experience is theft. Thefts often occur when Volunteers are away from their sites, in crowded locations (such as markets or on public transportation), and when leaving items unattended.

Before you depart for Guatemala there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in the United States, particularly those that are irreplaceable or have sentimental value
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the States
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or “dummy” wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in Guatemala, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in Guatemala learn to do the following:

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one’s personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Be careful and conscientious about using electronics (phones, cameras, laptops, iPods, etc.) in public or leaving them unattended
- Limit alcohol consumption

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime occurs in Guatemala. You can reduce the risks by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally are less likely to steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns are favorite worksites for pickpockets.

The following are other security concerns in Guatemala of which you should be aware:

- A high percentage of the population is armed due to the carryover from the civil war that ended in 1996.
- In villages and small towns, citizens frequently take the law into their own hands, dispensing community justice. If you are even suspected of posing a threat to public safety, the consequences can be potentially dangerous.
- Nonessential travel should be kept to a minimum.
- Do not resist robbers. Nothing you own is worth being injured or killed.
- Avoid being out after dark.
- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive.

Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime

Because many Volunteer sites are in rural, isolated settings, you must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. To reduce the likelihood that you will become a victim of crime, you can take steps to make yourself less of a target such as ensuring your home is secure and developing relationships in your community. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Guatemala may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps

policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Guatemala will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Before and during service, your training will address these areas of concern so you can reduce the risks you face. For example, here are some strategies Volunteers employ:

- Living with a local family or on a family compound (Please note: a 27-month homestay is mandatory in Guatemala)
- Leave irreplaceable objects at home in the U.S.
- Purchase the Peace Corps-recommended personal property insurance Purchase personal property insurance if possible (especially if brining a laptop)
- Get to know local officials, police, and neighbors
- Travel with someone trusted by your community whenever possible and only on Peace Corps-approved transportation
- Avoid known high-crime areas

Support from Staff

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety and security incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also support and assist Volunteers who choose to make a formal complaint with local law enforcement. It is very important that a Volunteer reports an incident when it occurs. The reasons for this include obtaining medical care and emotional support, enabling Peace Corps staff to assess the situation to determine if there is an ongoing safety and security concern, protecting peer Volunteers and preserving the right to file a complaint. Should a Volunteer decide later in the process to file a complaint with law enforcement, this option may be compromised if evidence was not preserved at the time of the incident.

Office of Victim Advocacy

The Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) is a resource to Volunteers who are victims of crime, including sexual assault and stalking. Victim advocates are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help Volunteers understand their emotional, medical, and legal options so they may make informed decisions to meet their specific needs. The OVA provides a compassionate, coordinated, and supportive response to Volunteers who wish to access Peace Corps support services.

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy

Direct phone number: 202.692.1753

Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753

Duty phone: 202.409.2704 (available 24/7, call or text)

Email: victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov

Crime Data for Guatemala

Crime data and statistics for Guatemala, which is updated yearly, are available at the following link: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/guatemala>. Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of serious crimes. Crimes that do occur abroad are investigated and prosecuted by local jurisdictional authorities. If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to file a complaint with law enforcement, who will then determine whether to prosecute. If you decide to file a complaint, the Peace Corps will help through the process. The Peace Corps staff will ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Further, the Peace Corps will help you exercise your rights to the fullest extent possible under the laws of your host country.

The Peace Corps will train you on how to respond if you are the victim of a serious crime, including how to get to a safe location quickly and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify the Peace Corps as soon as you can so Peace Corps staff can provide assistance.

Volunteer Safety Support in Guatemala

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your service. The plan includes information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. Guatemala's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Guatemala office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part to ensure that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

Volunteer training will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Guatemala. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural aspects, health, and other components of training. You will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas, including safety and security, as a condition of service.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and worksites. Site selection is based, in part, on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; different housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Guatemala's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. If there is a security threat, you may be required to gather with other Volunteers in Guatemala at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers immediately report any safety and security incidents to the Peace Corps office. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to current and future Volunteers.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW

The Peace Corps mission is to promote world peace and friendship and to improve people's lives in the communities where Volunteers serve. Instituting policies and practices to support a diverse and inclusive work and Volunteer environment is essential to achieving this mission.

Through inclusive recruitment and retention of staff and Volunteers, the Peace Corps seeks to reflect the rich diversity of the United States and bring diverse perspectives and solutions to development issues. Additionally, ensuring diversity among staff and Volunteers enriches interpersonal relations and communications for the staff work environment, the Volunteer experience, and the communities in which Volunteers serve.

The Peace Corps defines diversity as a “collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively. These include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures. Diversity also encompasses differences among people concerning where they are from and where they have lived and their differences of thought and life experiences.”

We define inclusion as a “culture that connects each [staff member and Volunteer] to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization so that all individuals are able to participate and contribute to their full potential.” The Peace Corps promotes inclusion throughout the lifecycle of Volunteers and staff. When staff and Volunteers are able to share their rich diversity in an inclusive work environment, the Peace Corps mission is better fulfilled. More information about diversity and inclusion can be found in the Volunteer Handbook.

An inclusive agency is one that seeks input from everyone in an effort to find the best ideas and strategies possible to execute its objectives. When input is solicited, heard, and considered from a rich multitude of individuals the best course of action usually emerges. The Peace Corps seeks to improve its operations and effectiveness by ensuring that all voices and ideas are heard and that all Volunteers and staff feel welcome and appreciated. When each person's voice is heard, the agency is stronger and the impact of Volunteers is strengthened.

Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site

Once Volunteers arrive at their sites, diversity and inclusion principles remain the same but take on a different shape, in which your host community may share a common culture and you—the Volunteer—are the outsider. You may be in the minority, if not the sole American like you, at your site. You will begin to notice diversity in perspectives, ethnicity, age, depth of conversation, and degree of support you may receive. For example, elders, youth, and middle-aged individuals all have unique points of views on topics you may discuss, from perspectives on work, new projects, and social engagements to the way community issues are addressed.

Peace Corps staff in your host country recognize the additional adjustment issues that come with living and working in new environments and will provide support and guidance to Volunteers. During pre-service training, a session will be held to discuss diversity and inclusion and how you can serve as an ally for your peers, honoring diversity, seeking inclusion, challenging prejudice and exclusion, exploring your own biases, and learning mechanisms to cope with these adjustment issues. The Peace Corps looks forward to having Volunteers from varied backgrounds that include a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, sexual orientations, and gender identities. The agency expects you to work collaboratively to create an inclusive environment that transcends differences and finds common ground.

Cross-Cultural Considerations

Outside of Guatemala's capital, residents of rural communities might have had little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical U.S. behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Guatemala are known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community where you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

As a Volunteer and representative of the United States, you are responsible not only for sharing the diversity of U.S. culture (to include your individual culture and the culture of other Americans) with your host country national counterparts, but also for learning from the diversity of your host country. An important aspect of this cultural exchange will be to demonstrate inclusiveness within your community in a sensitive manner. Additionally, you will share the responsibility of learning about the diversity of your fellow Peace Corps Volunteers and exploring how best to respect differences while serving as supportive allies as you go through this challenging new experience.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in your host country, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental, compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence they have in the United States; male Volunteers may be expected to not perform chores or other tasks ascribed to women; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead a diversity, inclusion, and sensitivity discussion during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support. This training covers how to adapt personal choices and behavior to be respectful of the host country culture, which can have a direct impact on how Volunteers are viewed and treated by their new communities. The Peace Corps emphasizes professional behavior and cross-cultural sensitivity among Volunteers and within their communities to help integrate and be successful during service.

An ideal way to view the pursuit of cross-cultural adaptation and/or cultural integration is to recognize that everything done in your host country has both a specific reason for why it is done and an expected outcome. Trust that your host country counterparts are acting with positive intentions and work to mutually seek understanding and commonality. Language differences may add a communication barrier and lead to misunderstandings. Listen more than you speak and seek clarity. Remember that having the ability to laugh at yourself and at life's little surprises goes a long way—laughter is universal.

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Overview of Diversity in Guatemala

The Peace Corps staff in Guatemala recognizes the adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance. During pre-service training, several sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping strategies. We look forward to having male and female Volunteers from a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, and sexual orientations, and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who take pride in supporting one another and demonstrating the richness of American culture.

In the past, Peace Corps/Guatemala has had an active diversity network. The diversity network has worked with several goals in mind, including open communication, building common ground, and acceptance training. Currently, the Gender and Development (GAD) and the Cultural, Ethnic, and Diversity Development groups have developed a co-facilitated, interactive, and thought-provoking training session that focuses on group dynamics, stereotypes, and discrimination. This group of Volunteers is currently working with Peace Corps/Guatemala staff to encourage dialogue as a way to address and embrace our differences as Americans.

Possible Gender Role Issues

Gender is a set of socially constructed roles, responsibilities, behaviors, and opportunities. Gender differs from sex, which refers specifically to biological and physiological characteristics of males and females. Gender roles and expectations are learned, change over time, and vary within and among cultures. Volunteers are trained in gender awareness as they approach their work in the host country. Gender roles in the United States may differ greatly from those in your country of service. It is important to absorb and to attempt to understand the cultural nuances of gender where you are. For example, in many cultures males are held in higher regard than females and females may manage the households. In some places, females are encouraged to attend school, while in other countries females are discouraged from engaging in such activities and instead work inside or outside of the home.

During the pre-service training, trainees receive an introduction to gender awareness in their country of service, and examine their own thinking about gender roles and how this thinking has impacted them. They then learn how to analyze development projects using a gender lens to better understand gender roles in their host country and to understand how these gender roles can benefit or limit what females and males may or may not do. During their 27 months of service, Volunteers will further engage in gender trainings to understand better how their gender identity impacts who they are as females or males in the host country and how this perception influences their work and relationships.

In rural Guatemala, there is a genuine division between the roles of women and men. The degree of separation frequently leads people to rely on stereotypical beliefs about people of the opposite sex—men with respect to women and vice versa. This dependence upon stereotypical images lends itself to the dehumanization of relations between men and women and to a situation in which people are viewed as objects. Unfortunately, the image of American women portrayed in many popular television programs suggests that they are sexually available. Additionally, in some regions of Guatemala, male virility is identified with power and social dominance. Many female Volunteers find the numerous sexually explicit invitations they receive to be intolerable and offensive. However, during pre-service training, Peace Corps/Guatemala staff and Volunteers will help trainees develop appropriate and effective strategies to deal with these issues.

Volunteer Comments

“Working as a female professional in Guatemala presents a variety of challenges, mainly due to many culturally entrenched ideas of women as housewives and subservient to men. I have encountered many situations in which men have certain expectations or preconceptions of me because I am a woman; however, through many candid conversations, anecdotes from my life in the U.S., and exemplifying gender equality, I believe I have been able to make a positive impact on breaking gender norms in my community. Fortunately, gender equality is slowly improving as the country develops and organizations and individuals fight for this important cause. Both men and women in Peace Corps/Guatemala can contribute in a variety of ways to this transformation, beginning with individuals and moving communitywide.”

“Gender is an issue that affects every PCV, man or woman, and is something that we all think about on a daily basis. Every PCV is responsible for promoting gender equality, through informal example-setting and formal trainings. Themes relating to gender are great opportunities to make a difference in your community, but it can also be a great source of frustration, so I encourage you to reach out to other PCVs and Peace Corps staff when you are in need of a pep talk or strategy to deal with the challenges that gender presents in your work and your life. We are exciting to have you in Guatemala, working for a more equitable future!”

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Volunteers of color sometimes, but not always, have a different Peace Corps experience than white Volunteers. Because of limited exposure, some foreign nationals will expect to see U.S. citizens who are white. Cultures of the world do not typically envision the States as a place of rich diversity with various culturally acceptable perspectives, personalities, and characteristics. Thus, a Volunteer of color may be questioned as about their U.S. citizenship.

In places where American stereotypes and/or caste system dynamics influence perception, Volunteers of color should be mindful of the reasons for these views without creating contentious environments. All too often, host country nationals are simply unaware of the diversity of the United States and require additional information and dialogue. Direct interactions with someone new or something different can take time to get used to, but those who take the time tend to be better off. Although host country nationals may assert that the United States is made up of predominately one race, we know that is not true. If a member of your community knows of compatriots living in the United States or of notable U.S. citizens of color, you can build on this knowledge as a point of reference for discussing diversity within the States.

For Volunteers of color, the range of responses to their skin color may vary from the extremely kind to the very insensitive. In African and Latin American countries, host country nationals may say “welcome home” to African Americans or Hispanic Americans. Sometimes Volunteers expect to be “welcomed home” but are disappointed when they are not. More commonly, if a Volunteer is mistaken for a host-country national citizen, he or she is expected to behave as a male or female in that culture behaves, and to speak the local language fluently. Host country nationals are sometimes frustrated when the Volunteer does not speak the local language with ease. Conversely, some in the same country may call you a “sell out” because they feel the United States has not done enough to help with social issues. These instances can be turned into teachable moments for the Volunteer and the host country national, in which the Volunteer can ask questions surrounding perception and collaborate with respect to issues and projects at hand, while engaging in cross-cultural exchanges. All Volunteers, to include white Volunteers and those of color, should be mindful of the issues of race that are embedded in U.S. culture and within the culture in your country of service. These issues may significantly affect how Volunteers interact with fellow Volunteers and host country nationals. Being open and inclusive to everyone will improve your experience in interacting with fellow Volunteers and members of your host community.

The dynamic of racism does not play out in Guatemala in quite the same way as it does in the United States. The first identification of the Volunteer is as a *gringo*, an identification that is a mixture of admiration and resentment that varies from person to person. Gringos are typically thought of as being of Caucasian descent, rich, and sometimes overbearing. Therefore, Volunteers of color are often not initially viewed as gringos or even American. Stereotypically, all Asian Americans are described as *chino* and sometimes are assumed to be associated with the Korean clothing industry present in Guatemala. African Americans are called *moreno* or *negro* and often are thought to be *garifuna*, a Guatemalan ethnic group primarily populating the Caribbean coast. Volunteers of Latin and Southeast Asian descent are often assumed to be Guatemalan. Conversations with Guatemalans regarding one’s ethnicity and heritage are numerous, sometimes to the point of being annoying. However, this allows Volunteers the opportunity to educate host country nationals about the true nature of American diversity. Without a doubt, Volunteers of color have positive, rich, and successful Peace Corps experiences in Guatemala.

Volunteer Comment

“It’s nice to know that everywhere I go in Guatemala, people are interested in knowing who I am and what I represent as an American. As a person of color, I am more than just an American Volunteer; I am a representative of the diversity that makes America so unique.”

Possible Issues for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Ally (LGBTQA) Volunteers

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Guatemala's traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. Although same-sex relations are not illegal, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that Guatemala is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQA Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at lgbprcv.org. Additionally, the Peace Corps' LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at spectrum@peacecorps.gov.

For Ally Volunteers: Peace Corps staff intends to create open, inclusive, and accepting environments. As an agency, the Peace Corps encourages Volunteers to serve as allies to their LGBTQ colleagues in order to create a safe environment.

Many LGBTQ Volunteers have served successfully in Guatemala and have very fond memories of their community and service. LGBTQA support groups may be available in your country of service, providing a network to support the needs of the Peace Corps LGBTQA community. Peace Corps staff will work with Volunteers to provide them with locally informed perspectives.

In Guatemala, the common perception of same-sex couples is different than that in the United States. Same-sex relationships are considered by many to be taboo and can provoke varied reactions in rural communities. Neighbors and friends in rural communities may deny the existence of homosexuality within their community, believing it to only exist in the capital and in other countries. For Volunteers, there is pressure to live more "in" than "out," especially in rural communities, despite having been "out" in the United States.

Lesbians, as most women in general, will have to deal with constant questions about boyfriends, marriage, and sex. Gay men must deal with *machismo*: talk of sexual conquests, girl watching, and dirty jokes.

Most tourist destinations have a more relaxed attitude, and discrete homosexuality is less likely to provoke a severe reaction as in village communities.

Despite generally negative perceptions of homosexuality within Guatemala, there are openly gay Guatemalans, as well as some gay organizations and businesses that serve and advocate for the LGBT community, especially in the capital and Quetzaltenango and in some tourist areas. In addition, an LGBT committee of Volunteers provides support for trainees and Volunteers, and periodically organizes social outings for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender Volunteers and friends. Peace Corps/Guatemala staff is available and enthusiastic to support Volunteers' initiative in renewing this group.

Volunteer Comments

"Guatemala has many contrasts. The perspective toward homosexuality is one of them. Although in most areas the issue of homosexuality is negatively viewed, there are stark differences in how one manages life as a gay Volunteer. In the *oriente* (east), one has to deal with rampant sexist and

homophobic jokes, while in the *altiplano* (highlands), the Mayan culture has traditionally been more tolerant, at least overtly. Still, in the *altiplano*, one has to manage other issues. With patience, professionalism, and humor, virtually all issues related to homosexuality can be assuaged.

“Like everywhere, gay folks have managed to find their niche in Guatemalan society. This tends to be most likely in the capital, in Quetzaltenango, and in tourist areas. Although living a closeted life in rural Guatemala can be lonely, there are always other Volunteers, foreigners, and Guatemalans to provide a necessary social outlet.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Health Services determined you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without additional medical support, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Guatemala without a significant risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/Guatemala staff will work with disabled Volunteers to support them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

In the wake of 36 years of civil war, there are a number of people with permanent disabilities. However, there is virtually no consideration for access to public transportation or public buildings for persons with disabilities.

Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples

Before committing to Peace Corps service, couples should consider how different degrees of enthusiasm about Peace Corps service, adaptation to the physical and cultural environment, and homesickness will affect their lives. It can be helpful to recognize that your reactions to these issues will change throughout your service, and you may not always feel the same as your partner. You and your partner will have different jobs, different schedules, and different societal pressures. One partner may learn the language faster than the other or have a more satisfying assignment. This can create competition and put different kinds of stress on each person. Anticipating how these pressures will affect you and your partner differently throughout your service can help you remain a source of support for each other. Making friends with other Volunteers is a critical part of fitting into the larger volunteer culture and can also be a good way to expand your support network.

While couples will live together during their service, they may live in separate towns during their pre-service training. This is a stressful time for most Volunteers, and it can be helpful to discuss in advance how you will deal with this potential separation. Your partner can be an important source of stability but can also add stress to your training experience. You may feel torn between traveling to visit your partner and focusing on your training, your host family, and friends you have made at your training site.

Couples often face pressure from host country nationals to change their roles to conform better with traditional Guatemala relationships. Guatemala men and women alike will often not understand American relationship dynamics and may be outwardly critical of relationships that do not adhere to traditional gender roles. It is also helpful to think about how pressures to conform to Guatemala culture can be challenging to men and women in very different ways. Considering how your partner is being affected and discussing what, if any, aspects of your relationship should be changed can help reduce stress for you both.

In Peace Corps/Guatemala, couples will likely not live together during pre-service training (PST). The community-based training model locates trainees in communities based on their technical program and Spanish level. Special considerations are given to couples so that they live in nearby communities, and they will have more flexibility to see each other. Language acquisition and cultural integration increase when

each member of the couple has a separate host family. The couple will serve together in the same site for the two years of their Volunteer service.

Volunteer Comment

“In our service as a couple in the Peace Corps, we can honestly say that it has its ups and downs. It may have not been the easiest journey but has been most rewarding for both of us. We are sharing and exploring the many different experiences that come with living in a new culture including overcoming challenges together. One of our challenges of serving is a lack of privacy in-site. Living with a host family can be taxing on the both of you but personal time away has been essential to enjoy some cherished quality time with each other and reconnect. This time has also allowed us to both strengthen our bond and renew our enthusiasm about the work we are doing in our site. Also, another positive aspect about serving together is that we are each other’s best allies. I once read that for couples, two years of Peace Corps service is like five years back in the States because of the time we actually spend together. This is so true since in service you have the time to be with and collaborate more than anytime back in the United States. This has been the most rewarding aspect of service.”

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Guatemala is a profoundly religious country where religion is public and emotional. For Volunteers used to a more contemplative or low-key religious tradition, it may be a challenge to identify other people who can support your faith. Although Guatemala’s constitution guarantees freedom of religion, most churches are either Roman Catholic or Christian Fundamentalist. In the tension between Catholics and Fundamentalists, there has been little recognition of other faith communities, including Mayan religious practices, but this is changing. Many Guatemalans remain uninformed about Judaism. Managing a conversation can be delicate and some Volunteers have had difficulty being open about their Jewish ethnicity. There is, however, a rich history of Jews in Guatemala and an active Jewish community that welcomes foreigners. There are also various Christian denominations, Hindu, and Muslim communities in Guatemala. Peace Corps/Guatemala staff can provide information to Volunteers who are interested in connecting to various communities of faith.

Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers

Senior Volunteers may find their age an asset in Guatemala. They will often have access to individuals and insights that are not available to younger Volunteers. On the other hand, they will be in a distinct minority within the Volunteer population and could find themselves feeling isolated, looked up to, or ignored.

Seniors are often accustomed to a greater degree of independence and freedom of movement than the Peace Corps’ program focus and safety and security practices allow. Pre-service training can be particularly stressful for seniors, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. A senior may be the only older person in a group of Volunteers and initially may not feel part of the group. Younger Volunteers may look to an older Volunteer for advice and support; some seniors find this to be an enjoyable experience, while others choose not to fill this role. Some seniors may find it difficult to adapt to a lack of structure and clarity in their role after having worked for many years in a very structured and demanding job.

More than younger Volunteers, older Volunteers may have challenges in maintaining lifelong friendships and dealing with financial matters from afar. They may want to consider assigning power of attorney to someone in the States.

Volunteer Comments

“Guatemala is a country where most of the population is younger than 20 years old. Babies,

toddlers, and young children seem to be almost everywhere. A person in his or her 40s in a rural community is traditionally considered to be an elder, and tends to be afforded a good deal of deference and respect. Senior Volunteers will often find themselves adopted as ‘honorary grandparents’ for much of the community.”

“On the other hand, most young villagers believe that elders are no longer interested, or able to play a role in the work of a community or village. However, with a sense of humor you can figure out how far you can go in offering advice and suggestions. Learning Spanish is hard work, but if you keep trying, it will come. In the meantime, the few words you know, along with gestures and a smile, will go a long way.”

“Routine medical care in larger cities is good and the Peace Corps medical staff is outstanding. Living out in the countryside is a little more complicated, but on my trips to more urban areas, I stock up on items I can’t buy at home. Getting around is always an adventure, and public transportation is very inexpensive.”

“I have experienced a deference that is not always accorded to elderly Guatemalans, so when someone kindly offers a seat on the bus, I acknowledge the kind gesture and gladly accept! It’s rewarding to be an example of the challenges we can undertake, no matter what our age. Through our presence here, we demonstrate the diversity of Americans, especially as Volunteers. It definitely impresses people that we chose to leave behind loved ones to live in their country for two years.”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Guatemala?

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 100 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds per bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution.

What is the electric current in Guatemala?

Electric current is the U.S. standard 120 volts.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. You will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover your expenses. Volunteers often wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave (contact your insurance company). Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items abroad. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, electronics, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and, in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Guatemala do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

What should I bring as gifts for Guatemala friends and my host family?

This is not a requirement. A token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or photos to give away.

Where will my site assignment be when I finish training and how isolated will I be?

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are frequently within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require 10–12 hours to reach the Peace Corps/Guatemala post.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach Unit provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Counseling and Outreach Unit immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. The Counseling and Outreach Unit can be reached at 855.855.1961, select option 1, ext. 1470. After business hours, on weekends, and on holidays, the COU duty officer can be reached at the same number. For non-emergency questions, your family can contact your country desk staff through the main Peace Corps number: 855.855.1961. The Guatemala desk can also be reached via email at Guatemala@peacecorps.gov.

How easy is it to call home from Guatemala?

Virtually all PCVs make long-distance international calls from their own cellular phones using pre-paid telephone cards widely available around the country. Calls to the U.S. under most cellphone plans cost less than 15 cents per minute. Most Volunteers use the Internet for non-emergency international communications.

Should I bring a cellphone with me?

During pre-service training, all Peace Corps trainees are assigned a cellular phone for use during their service, which must be returned upon completing service. Calls to staff members, the Peace Corps office, and other trainees and Volunteers are free using the Peace Corps-issued phone. Each phone also comes with minutes every month to make calls and send text messages, local or international. Volunteers can add minutes to their cellular phones in local shops to use for local or international calls. Phones brought from the U.S. may not be compatible with local networks so it is generally advisable to use your Peace Corps phone.

Will there be email and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?

Email and Internet access are available in most of the country, either in Internet cafes (where computer terminals can be rented by the hour) or through the purchase of a USB modem and Internet time, either on an hourly, weekly, or monthly basis. During training, you will have sporadic access to Internet depending on your training town. There are, however, several Volunteer workstations in the Peace Corps office that you can use to check your email once a week.

It is your decision whether to bring a laptop. Volunteers who choose to bring their laptops generally use them to create documents for work-related purposes, check email, and communicate with friends and family back home. It is important to know that laptops bring a good price in the local markets for stolen goods so they are at some risk of being stolen. In order to minimize risk, it is advisable to avoid traveling

with laptops or other electronics on public transportation and keep them secured in your home when not in use. In the last two years, many Volunteers have chosen to purchase Netbook-style laptops, which are smaller and less expensive. The Peace Corps cannot reimburse Volunteers for damage or theft to laptops or other electronic devices and advises Volunteers to seriously consider property insurance. Please remember that the Peace Corps is unable to provide you with hardware or software assistance for a personal laptop and it is up to you to maintain it.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM GUATEMALA VOLUNTEERS

Dear Prospective Peace Corps Volunteers of Guatemala,

Congratulations on your Peace Corps invitation to serve in Guatemala! Get ready to have an incredible experience that you will remember forever! Not only is Guatemala a gorgeous country to see and explore, but the culture and the people are just as beautiful as the scenery that surrounds them.

As a Healthy Schools Volunteer, I work with teachers, parent associations, and various other organizations to promote health in schools, implement a health curriculum, and create a healthy learning environment for the students. A project that I am currently working on and very excited about is creating a Health Promotion Committee of students and teachers between a boys' school and a girls' school. I hope to empower this group of students with knowledge of health topics so they can do projects that will make a difference in their schools and also in the community. Your work and the projects you will accomplish will be amazing, but the relationships and friendships you will make along the way are a huge contribution to what will make your service so memorable! I have made some great friends in my community and have even joined a basketball team in a community league. These are the things that really make me feel like a part of the community, which is an important part of your service as well and will only enhance your experience!

This type of sustainable development work is challenging, but the bigger the challenge, the greater the reward! You are about to begin a journey in which patience, flexibility, a good sense of humor, an open mind, and a positive attitude are your keys to success. Enjoy your service day by day and live in the moment. The relationships you will make with Guatemalans and other Volunteers are lifetime friendships that you will cherish forever. I wish you all the best during your time in Guatemala! Welcome to our Peace Corps family!

Caitlin Olson
Healthy Schools, 2014–16

Dear Prospective Peace Corps Volunteers of Guatemala,

Congratulations on being invited to become a part of the Peace Corps/Guatemala team and family! Guatemala is an incredible country, surrounded by miles of mountains, volcanoes, lakes, welcoming people, and new cultures and traditions around every bend. I can assure you that your decision to commit to service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guatemala will be a fulfilling, life-changing experience that you will keep with you for the rest of your life!

I am a Maternal and Child Health Volunteer, working in an indigenous community. Our goal as a project is to improve the health state of mothers and children in Guatemala. I focus on training of trainers; specifically, I teach improved education methodologies and behavior change concepts to health center personnel, in order to increase the likelihood of achieving behavior change in the rural communities. In addition to our "training of trainers" work, we focus on strengthening community health commissions and establishing pregnancy clubs. Ultimately, we are here to provide support for the health workers, so that a decrease in mortality rates and a sustainably healthier Guatemala can be achieved.

I love my job as a Health Volunteer in Guatemala. Every day I learn something new from my community members and co-workers, as well as something new about myself. Your decision to join the Peace Corps and become a member of our family is the most rewarding commitment that you could make at this point in your life's journey. You will undoubtedly encounter many hardships; however, each hardship leads to a

lesson learned and a memorable, valuable, unforgettable service. Take a deep breath and smile! You made it! Welcome to Guatemala!

Lauren Chambers
Maternal and Child Health, 2013–15

Dear Prospective Peace Corps Volunteers of Guatemala,

I want to begin by congratulating you on receiving your invitation to serve in Guatemala, all the way from my home in the beautiful tree-covered mountains of the Western Highlands. At any age or stage of life, your time in the Peace Corps is an incredible personal and professional journey. Enjoy this moment and know that accepting this challenge will change the way you see the world forever.

As a Youth in Development Volunteer, I spend most of my days in one rural village on a hill that overlooks its larger municipality. Over time, I have embraced a multifunctional role in the community working with adolescents and their service providers. While my main job is to co-facilitate workshops on life skills with teachers at the only middle school, I also direct two leadership groups at an education center with a modest computer lab and small library. I really like teaching and just talking to the students about their lives. Most of them go home to one-room houses they share with their large families; their mothers prepare meals on wood-burning stoves while their fathers work in the fields during the day. You can probably imagine that I grew up in a much different environment, and yet many of the decisions they must make and the changes they go through are similar to those of my own adolescence. Through personal experience and education as well as my Peace Corps training, I feel confident in my knowledge of important topics for youth such as communication, self-esteem, decision-making, goal setting, drugs and alcohol, and sexual health. Relating to students one-to-one has added another layer to my service and has been the most rewarding aspects of the work. I have found that direct service is a crucial element of this job although Youth in Development Volunteers work in varying capacities at the community or municipal level.

No matter the project, Peace Corps Volunteers must be patient and understanding about the current pace of progress in their site. First we must listen and learn as much as we possibly can before using what we know to make informed decisions with our work partners. It takes time to figure out what the community really needs and wants versus what we want for them. For that reason, I believe that cultural sensitivity is just as much about recognizing your own values and prejudices as it is recognizing those of your host country. Your job as a Peace Corps Volunteer is to give hope by encouraging Guatemalans to think critically about their future and become agents of their own change.

In two years, no one is going to change the world. We cannot overturn deeply rooted value systems of entire communities, we cannot single-handedly transform education systems, and we certainly cannot expect people to accept our foreign ideas on the first day in-country.

What we *can* do is make strong positive impacts on individuals and teach them what we know. Developing professional relationships, bonding with host families, and building camaraderie among fellow Volunteers will prove to be invaluable practices during your service.

If I make one promise to you it's that you will learn something new every single day—about yourself, your new home, and the people you serve. This is your chance to connect to the world like never before. All the best in your Peace Corps journey,

Melissa Dishart
Youth in Development Volunteer, 2013–15

Dear Prospective Peace Corps Volunteers of Guatemala,

Congratulations on accepting the invitation to serve in Peace Corps/Guatemala! Soon you will be embarking on a journey of service and personal growth that will be with you for the rest of your life.

As a Peace Corps Response Volunteer in the Food Security program, it is my job to work with farmers and farmer associations in the space somewhere between agriculture and nutrition. Response projects are usually shorter (currently all PCR positions in Guatemala are nine to 12 months) but integration, positivity, and cultural awareness and sensitivity are as important to our current roles as they will be to yours. In the next nine months, I will work with a farmer association that exports to U.S. and European markets but is looking to increase their profit margins by certifying its farmers under internationally recognized quality control standards. The association hopes that by implementing these improved practices, their producers will not only gain the certification but also increase yields, reduce the use of expensive chemical pesticides and environmental damage, and become more economically and environmentally sustainable. The association is part of a larger program on decreasing malnutrition in the community so they will also be receiving trainings from other organizations on how to translate increased incomes into increased food security.

In many ways, agriculture defines Guatemala—both its past and present. Mayan civilization was originally made possible through the advent of maize production and, for thousands of years, the crop has sustained generations of Guatemalans. Today, somewhere around 40–50 percent of Guatemalan’s population works in agriculture, most commonly as either subsistence farmers, export farmers, workers on large plantations, or pickers during the coffee harvest. Yet despite this emphasis on food production, Guatemala has the fourth-highest rate of malnutrition in the world and highest in the Western Hemisphere. Around 50 percent of the Guatemalan population is malnourished and that number spikes to above 65 percent in many indigenous communities of the Western Highlands.

Guatemala is a beautiful country with much to offer those who spend the time and effort getting to know her. You will certainly be challenged over the course of your two years here but I hope you all learn to find beauty in the complexity. Best wishes.

Stephen Oliver
Peace Corps Response Volunteer, Food Security, 2009–11, 2014–15

PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Guatemala and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything on the list, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Guatemala.

The climate in Guatemala varies greatly from cold to hot. The Peace Corps office in Santa Lucia Milpas Altas (near Antigua) is at a high altitude. Nights are cool and the days are typically warm although the rainy season doesn't finish until October or November so the days can be rainy or damp. Having raingear and having layers for the cool weather is prudent. Furthermore, the majority of Volunteers are placed in sites in the western highlands, where high altitudes lead to cold temperatures, especially November through February. It cannot be stressed enough that although the prevailing image of a Central American country is of sun-soaked beaches and palm trees (those areas exist in Guatemala, but there are no Volunteer sites on the beach and a very small number in warm climates), the mountainous terrain of Guatemala can produce very cold temperatures. Keep this in mind when packing and choose layers of clothing.

General Clothing

- One or two pairs of nice pants (lightweight material that dry quickly is helpful)
- Two to four pairs of work pants or jeans
- Four T-shirts or short-sleeve polo shirts
- Two or three blouses or dress shirts
- Two-week supply of underwear and socks
- One pair of long underwear
- One pair of wool socks
- One or two medium-weight sweaters/sweatshirts
- One medium-weight jacket or fleece
- One raincoat
- Belt
- Handkerchiefs
- Running or athletic gear (if you are into sports)
- Swimsuit
- Two hats (sun hats, visors, or caps with bill)
- One cold-weather cap
- One pair of lightweight gloves
- Sunglasses

For Men

- A tie, one or two nice dress shirts, and a sport coat (optional) for formal occasions like the swearing-in ceremony

For Women

- Two casual dresses
- One “dress-up” dress
- One or two “going-out” outfits
- One or two knee-length skirts

- PJ pants or comfy sweats for the house
- Scarf

Note: The general characteristics for clothes are sturdy, easily washable, iron-free (if possible), and conservative. Bring what you are comfortable wearing, such as presentable items you might wear on a weekend in the U.S. Good quality, used clothes are also available in many Guatemalan markets or stores (called *Ropa Americana*).

Additionally, many Volunteers have noted their work often requires business casual for special meetings or events. As one Volunteer noted, “Although many items on this list may seem like it, you are not preparing for a two-year camping trip, nor do you need to.”

Shoes

- One or two pairs of sturdy walking, tennis, or cross-training shoes (waterproof tennis shoes are preferable)
- One pair of hiking boots or waterproof shoes
- One to two pairs of comfortable casual/dress shoes (closed-toed)
- One pair of shower flip-flops
- One pair of farm/mud boots or rain boots

Note: The overall selection and quality of shoes in Guatemala is more limited than in the U.S. It is difficult to find larger than size 9 for women and size 10 for men. If you have larger feet, you may want to consider a plan for getting extra shoes once the ones you bring wear out (e.g., bring a two-year supply, have people bring you shoes when they come to visit, or arrange for people to send them to you).

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Your regular hygiene items (e.g., soap, shampoo, shaving cream, etc.) to get you started (replacements/refills are easily purchased here)
- Three-month supply of prescription medicine
- Extra pair of prescription glasses
- Refillable travel-size shampoo/soap containers
- One bath towel and quick-dry towel for traveling

Note: Each trainee will receive a “Medical Kit” stocked full of useful items soon after arriving, and Peace Corps medical staff will supply you with over-the-counter medicines such as vitamins, painkillers, cold medicines, Tampax-brand tampons, etc., throughout your service.

Electronics

- Laptop computer (if you can’t live without one in the U.S., then you probably won’t want to live without one here)
- Music (MP3 players and travel-size speakers are a good idea if you are bringing audio equipment, and CDs are sold in every market at very cheap prices)
- USB storage stick
- Digital camera (online photo sites are convenient places to store photos for those without a computer or you may want to bring a few blank CDs to transfer your photos during training)
- Watch (fairly cheap and water-resistant/proof)
- Small travel alarm clock

Kitchen

- Pocketknife (basic knife, corkscrew, screwdriver model is very handy)

- Small, basic cookbook or favorite recipes (Peace Corps/Guatemala also publishes “Qué Rico!” a cookbook of Volunteer-compiled recipes that are easily prepared with common items sold at markets)
- Comfort foods (favorite snack foods)

Miscellaneous

- Sturdy backpack/duffel bag for three- or four-day trips
- Day pack/small backpack
- Flashlight (headlamps are popular)
- Money belt or pouch that fits under your clothes for your passport, money, and/or a wallet or change purse to carry small amounts of money
- One sturdy water bottle
- Sleeping bag
- Sleeping pad
- Waterproof cases for cameras, MP3 players, or other electronic devices
- Earplugs for sleeping (Guatemala can be a very loud country and although Peace Corps does have earplugs to distribute, they are not very comfortable to wear while sleeping)
- Travel guide to Guatemala
- Photos of family, friends, and home (Guatemalans will love to see your photos)
- Decks of cards and a travel-sized version of your favorite board game
- Small sewing kit
- Duct tape
- Instrument (if you play one)
- Books (Peace Corps has a fairly large library at each office with books passed down from Volunteers)
- Start-up supply of stationery, pens, journal, etc.
- One set of flat sheets and pillow cases for a full bed

Tips and Notes:

- Guatemala uses the same 120-voltage current as in the United States; therefore, any appliance or charger from the U.S. will work here. Also, the plug-ins and sockets are the same, but the majority of them only accept two prongs. Two- to three-prong converters can be found here, but it might be better to bring MP3 chargers, blow dryers, computer cords, etc., that are two-pronged or bring an adapter with you.
- Anything you bring, especially the more expensive items, has the possibility of being lost, stolen, or damaged. The Peace Corps is not responsible for personal items, so you might want to consider insurance for items that would be costly to be replaced.
- As mentioned in this packing list, you can find practically everything you need here in Guatemala. Paiz and Walmart stores (large discount goods and department stores) are located in most of the major cities. While the selection of items in your site most certainly won't be as vast, there is a large quantity of familiar American brands of clothing, toiletry items, food, electronics, etc., available in Guatemala.

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items are relevant to everyone, and the list is not comprehensive.

Family

- Notify family that they can call the Counseling and Outreach Unit at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour phone number: 855.855.1961 ext. 1470).
- Give family and friends the Peace Corps On the Home Front handbook.

Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that your luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain a personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish service; if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a three-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are currently taking.

Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service abroad, it is advisable for people who have pre-existing conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

Personal Papers

- Bring a copy of your certificate of marriage or divorce.

Voting

- Register to vote in the state of your home of record. (Many state universities consider voting and payment of state taxes as evidence of residence in that state.)
- Obtain a voter registration card and take it with you overseas.
- Arrange to have an absentee ballot forwarded to you overseas.

Personal Effects

- Purchase personal property insurance to extend from the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.

Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the United States.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service. (Information about loan deferment is at peacecorps.gov/loans.)
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.

- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961 ext. 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.

CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

This list of numbers will help connect you with the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters to answer various questions. You can use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the toll-free number and extensions with your family so they can contact you in the event of an emergency.

Peace Corps headquarters toll-free number: 855.855.1961, press 1, then extension number (see below)

Peace Corps mailing address: Peace Corps
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters
1111 20th Street NW
Washington, DC 20526

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Kimberly Helm Desk Officer	ext. 2521 guatemala@peacecorps.gov	202.692.2521
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWTSatoTravel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal clearance:	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.544.1802
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Counseling and Outreach Unit	ext. 1470	202.692.1470
Office of Victim Advocacy		ext. 1753 24 hours (call or text)	202.692.1753 202.409.2704